

A WISE FATHER.

The Fourth is here at last, I know. For ere the night had fled, Outside my window came a noise That yanked me out of bed.

MIDDLETON'S LUCK.

A FOURTH OF JULY STORY.

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It is inconceivable to me. Do you actually propose to spend your life here, among these degraded creatures?

"I don't like to hear you speak in that way of my people, Violet. They are not degraded, but honest, faithful toil-

ers. I believe them to be sincerely attached to me, and I have a profound interest in them and their simple lives.

"Yes, I expect I shall always live near the mines and keep an eye on them. I do not believe that the owner of large property interests should absent himself from them and leave affairs in the hands of subordinates."

The girl turned her beautiful, insolent face toward the row of miners' cottages which dotted the hillsides above them, and after staring through her gold rimmed lorgnette at the tiny habitations a moment, dropped it and said contemptuously:

"Fancy!"

The two walked on in silence. Tom Middleton was too much to speak. This was not the first altercation he had had with his fiancée, Miss Violet Vancouver, on this subject.

Both were positive in their opinions. Each regarded the question from standpoints as opposite as the two poles. Tom felt a hopeless sort of rage as he glanced from under his eyelids at the fair, proud, contemptuous face under the big white parasol at his side.

And as they walked, a vague idea, which of late had puzzled him more than once, crept again in his mind. Could they be so far apart in their convictions and opinions as two planets—could they ever be happy together? He tried to fancy himself married to Violet. He saw her up at his beautiful house on the hill yonder—a queen in her drawing room. But when he tried to fancy her going about from cottage to cottage, looking after the sick and feeble tenants—when he attempted for one moment to imagine Violet as a mistress and he as a smilingly contented Miss Vancouver regarded him coldly:

"I am charmed that you amuse yourself," she said.

"I was wondering what you would do in case of an explosion in the mines," said Tom, with surprising candor.

The carriage which they had left for their walk was approaching. Violet put up her hand, daintily in its soft suede glove, and signaled the coachman. "I am going back to the house," she said haughtily. "Don't trouble yourself to come with me. No doubt you are needed 'down at the mines," and before Tom could recover from this sudden sally Violet had beaten a masterly retreat.

Miss Vancouver was a thorough Anglo-maniac. Tom Middleton, to whom she had been betrothed for six months, was on the contrary a typical American, believing in his country, its customs, laws and life. He had his own ideas on the relations between capital and labor, and he believed that every employer could individually do much to lessen the antipathy between the classes. Therefore he preferred to manage the Spittfire iron mines, of which he was part owner, to trusting affairs to another and idling his time away in the customary pursuits of young men of wealth.

His firmness on this point had vexed and annoyed Miss Vancouver beyond description. Repeatedly had she urged Tom to delegate his duties to an overseer, come to the city where she lived and lead "the life of a gentleman," as she was pleased to put it. But Middleton was exasperatingly stubborn and refused to leave the mines.

Violet and her mother had been visiting the Middletons through the lovely month of June, and Tom had made one more futile attempt to interest her in his aims and his life, but without avail. Violet drove back to the house this morning to sulk in stately fashion, while Tom walked slowly down to his office at the mouth of the mine, his hands in his pockets, his eyes upon the ground, thinking.

He was still thinking as he entered the office—thinking of that inflexible little blond head, turned so haughtily away from him as it vanished from his sight.

Possibly it was because he was thinking of Violet's stiff neck and defiant back hair that he suddenly noticed another head bent over the big ledger on the tall desk. It was quite as shapely as his fiancée's. The hair was a deep brown, and grew close to the temples, rippled just over the ears and was lobbed up at the back to show a very white, soft, pliant-looking neck. Tom looked at that neck thoughtfully. It wasn't a bit stiff. It had a delightfully womanly and yielding appearance, and the hair above it was soft and silky and seemed not to have a touch of a disagreeable will of its own. The owner of this neck and back hair lifted her head and turned her face as she heard Middleton's step. A light leaped into the gray eyes and a smile parted the sensitive lips.

"Good morning, Mr. Middleton."

Somehow the daily salutation from his pretty bookkeeper had never before fallen quite so musically on Tom's hearing. The gentle voice rested him, for Violet's contemptuous accents had tired him woefully.

"Good morning, Miss Clayton," he said. "Any news?"

"There was a delegation from the men here this morning," Miss Clayton answered. "There were Smithson, Jenkins, Preston and that terrible beast Jim Dowling, who was intoxicated and ugly."

"What did they want?" asked Middleton carelessly, preparing to open his mail.

"They seemed very excited, almost angry," replied Miss Clayton, "and said they should return about noon and hoped you would be here."

gation entered, headed by Jim Dowling, flushed, noisy, more surly than usual. This man was a firebrand, a constant menace to the community's peace, an instigator of broils and dissensions.

"Ah! good morning, boys," said Middleton cheerily. "What can I do for you?"

Smithson and the others looked ashamed at this cordial reception, heated and hung back. Not so Dowling, who blustered forward and swinging one big fist down upon the other, said:

"The boys have agreed that they must have two half holidays through the summer and another dollar a day, and they want to know when you're going to put them new roofs on their shanties. Here it is the 1st of July and nothing done. They think they've waited long enough. D'ye hear?" he concluded insolently.

"Is this the demand of the men," asked Middleton quietly, "or is it Jim Dowling's demand?"

Smithson spoke up eagerly. "We all know, Mr. Middleton, that you 'always do what's right by us and—"

"Shut up your—head," roared Dowling.

"There—that will do," said Middleton, still with that same ominous calmness. "That's just enough to show me that you, Dowling, and you alone, are responsible for this affair. Now I refuse absolutely to listen to you or hold any parley with you. I want you to leave my office at once. I will talk with you, boys, in a moment."

"I won't go," snarled Dowling.

"Oh, yes you will," and before the big ruffian could realize what was transpiring he was seized by the white faced athlete and hurled sprawling on the ground in front of the office.

"Yi-hi give it to him, Mr. Middleton," shrieked a high, shrill voice, and leaping with joy at Dowling's discomfiture, came the infant terrible of the neighborhood, freckled, tow headed, impish "Bub" Clayton, brother of the pretty bookkeeper and supported by his orphan sister's earnings.

"Give it to him, I'm with you," and he squared off and doubled up his puny fists at Dowling, who staggering to his feet hurled a tornado of curses at the master of the mines.

"I'll pay you for this," he growled as he retreated. "I'll pay you and give you compound interest—course you, then slunk away pursued by the hoots and contumely of "Bub" Clayton and his followers.

There was a short conference between Middleton and his men which must have resulted satisfactorily, for they shook his hand at parting and with smiling faces proceeded to the nearest saloon to drink their employer's health. In point of fact, Middleton learned that Dowling had instigated the scheme, taunted and dared the others to make these demands and insisted on being their spokesman. When Middleton showed them the letter from the architect whose plans for repairing the miners' cottages he had accepted, when he told them of the preparations he was making for the approaching Fourth of July celebration, they burst into cheers and then begged his pardon for having been temporarily led astray.

When, after closing the door behind his visitors and relaxing a bit from the strain he had been under, Middleton turned back to his desk he felt a timid touch on his arm. He looked up straight into a pair of lustrous gray eyes swimming with tears.

"Why, my child," he exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"That dreadful man," she faltered, "he will do something to you, I am afraid."

"Nonsense, my dear," said Middleton, patting her arm in quite a fatherly manner. "Don't cry. You are upset, and I don't wonder."

"But, please," Bess said tremulously, "please look out for that beast, and—carry a pistol or something. His face was murderous."

That night at dinner Middleton was strangely preoccupied. Somehow he could not banish the events of the morning, and through the light and the flowers about the table, in the sparkling amber in his wineglass, he saw that sweet, troubled face and the big gray eyes swimming in tears.

After dinner Violet came out upon the veranda where Tom sat smoking and deposited her fluffly draperies, her laces and frills upon a bamboo lounge. She wore her most aristocratic expression while a hardening about the pretty lips betokened an oncoming contest.

"Tom, dear," she drawled, "what is this new absurdity of which I hear?"

"Absurdity?" repeated Tom, "I don't know, Violet, to what you refer."

"Is it possible that you propose to give the miners a Fourth of July celebration?"

"Indeed I do. Bouffees, races, rockets—a rattling good old fashioned burrah. And every little chap is to have punk and fire crackers and every little girl torpedoes."

"You are only spoiling these creatures," began Violet, when to her amazement Tom rose and towered over her, looking very big, very aggressive, very masterful.

"Once, and for all, Violet," he said coolly, "will you have the goodness to stop nagging me about my business? I will

deed. Even in the course of ordinary human events his wickedness was tinged with a marvelous and interesting ingenuity. Judge, then, what rare and unexpected traits he developed on the two days preceding the Fourth with the spirit of '76 in the air. The high jinks he invented were appalling, and when he finished his sublime career on the afternoon of the 3d by driving Finnegan's pig and Smithson's calf tumbled through the streets his gentle, long suffering sister fell upon him, shook him, put him to bed and told him that she should ask Mr. Middleton as a personal favor to herself not to give him any ammunition on the morrow.

This crisis was so totally unexpected that "Bub" forgot to roar. He sank back upon the pillows and turned pale through his freckles. After he had recovered from the shock a bit he fell in a brown study. The result was a smile, which would have done credit to a first class fiend. "Bub" took his bread and milk and his sister's lecture so gently that her heart relented, and when she retired for the night she had decided she would not ask that personal favor.

"Bub" did not sleep. He had taken a nap in the early evening and was now quite wide awake and ready for business. He waited until Bessie's soft breathing assured him that she slept, then he arose and quickly dressed himself, cautiously slipped the front door and set out. He crept along in the shadows as he crossed the street to Middleton's office. For "Bub" was out with the nefarious intent of burglarizing. He knew of a window on the side of the office the catch of which was broken and which could be easily shoved up. He had heard Bessie say that Middleton had been busy all the evening opening the packages of fireworks.

Up went the window at his first touch, and in climbed the young scamp. The moonlight streaming in showed him the prize, and he fell greedily to work. His pockets were soon crammed and he was about to retreat, when he heard a sound that made every tow hair on his head stand upright—a noise at the window he had left open. The boy slipped behind a pile of packing boxes, and peering out saw a man climb in the window. It was Jim Dowling!

"Bub" retained his presence of mind so feebly not to yell.

Dowling prowled noiselessly about, trying to deal a safe and bestowful whiplash upon the huge pile of fireworks in the remote corner. "He is a thief, too," thought "Bub," with a sadder twinge of conscience, and quietly with trembling fingers restored his ill gotten gains to a box beside him.

Suddenly there was a light, quick step outside, and the click of a key in the office door. Dowling rushed past the trembling lad into the rear room, where the huge vault was situated.

The outside door opened and Middleton entered. He struck a match, lighted the gas, took off his hat and ran his fingers through his thick brown hair.

"I couldn't go to bed," he said aloud, "for I knew I shouldn't sleep. What am I going to do? It's a puzzle. I say over and over, 'the honor of the Middletons,' but it's empty of sound and doesn't console me. Well, I believe I'll look over those books tonight. I must do something to the myself out and make me sleep."

He lighted a cigar and started toward the door which led to the vault. Suddenly he stopped.

"What in heaven's name am I about? Going to the vault with a lighted cigar? I'm afraid I did a careless thing in telling them to store that giant powder in the vault. Oh, well, it don't matter; the magazine will be repaired in a few days, and then, if I haven't blown myself up in the meantime through my carelessness, I will have it removed at once."

Speaking thus, Middleton passed by the boy hidden there, who put out a trembling hand to warn him, but he didn't see the weak assistance.

"Bub" heard the combination click and presently Middleton came back with the books in his arms. He laid them on the desk, opened them and set to work.

"That" was wondering how he was going to get out of the scrape, when there suddenly stood by him with the stealthy tread of a wolf a man with a face so terrible, so awful in its hatred that the boy with difficulty repressed a scream. There was a red glare before "Bub's" frightened eyes through which he saw Dowling dead Middleton with a powerful blow on the back of the head with something bright and shining.

Middleton dropped like a log to the floor. Dowling snarled over him.

"My turn now, you high and mighty dog. I've got you now and I'll pay my debt right here, and you shall have your compound interest. I won't leave a trace of you. I'll blow you and your office to hell. Oh, I'll give them some Fourth of July fireworks they'll never forget."

"Bub" could never tell how he lives through the next few minutes. What he fairly straining from his head he watched Dowling enter the vault and knock the head out of a barrel of powder and insert the end of a fuse.

At last all was ready, the fuse lighted, Dowling turned out the gas and crept through the window.

He was gone!

Out from behind the boxes burst the frightened boy who had completely lost his wits. He bent over Middleton, and with his weak arms strove to lift him. His first thought was to drag Middleton from the building. As well try to move the vault yonder.

Then through the moonlight across the square, gasping, sobbing, stumbling, fled the boy. Through the open door, into his sister's room, upon her bed he flung him self.

"Bess! Bess!" he shrieked in agony. Two minutes later, barefooted, her long hair streaming over her shoulders, she knelt beside the man she loved. She thrust her girlish arms beneath Middleton and lifted him to her breast as a mother gathers her child.

"The bell, 'Bub,' the bell!" she stammered.

"Bub" caught the rope, and out upon the soft midsummer night rang the awful clamor. The bell fairly shrieked its frightful tidings—"Murder! murder!" leaped from its iron throat.

And when the half dressed miners came hurrying from their homes with terror stricken faces they saw a strange sight.

STANCHING THE BLOOD ON HIS HEAD.

Their master lay before his office door on the ground, Bess Clayton was stanching the blood on his head, while a small sunbonneted and freckled boy was crying hysterically beside her.

A few words told the story. "You lifted Mr. Middleton?" cried one man.

"Yes," whimpered "Bub," "she did. I dunno how she did it, but she did."

"But the fuse," cried another. "For God's sake, somebody cut the fuse!"

Bess lifted her haggard face. "Oh, I cut it," she said simply, "before I brought him out."

Tom Middleton did not die. A splendid constitution, unimpaired by excesses, brought him through a dangerous illness. He came back to the office two months later, pale, hollow eyed and thin. His people flocked about him, and many were the blessings showered upon him, both by rough miners and weeping women.

After Middleton had told the crowd that the long delayed Fourth of July celebration should occur the next evening, and the happy throng had dispersed, he turned toward Bess Clayton, who stood at her post smiling, but with tears in her eyes.

"Come here, Bessie," he said gently, holding out his thin hand. He had never called her Bessie before. She went slowly and timidly to him.

He drew her to him, and putting both arms about her said:

"My brave little girl."

"She trembled and blushed."

"My darling!" he said passionately.

"No, no," she cried, starting away from him, "you must not speak like that—I must not hear you."

"Yes, you must," he retorted, with his old fire, "I love you—I think I have loved you a long time Bess—you must be my wife."

"But Miss Vancouver?" said the girl gently.

"Miss Vancouver made a great mistake when she accepted me," said Middleton gravely. "She has realized her mistake. Oh, Bess, my darling, thank God, there is nothing between us and happiness."

A few moments later he raised her blushing face from his shoulder and said, "Now, dearest, when shall we be married?"

"I think, Tom," she said demurely, "that I should like to be married next Fourth of July."

"Why not this Fourth," he urged.

"This Fourth is past," she answered.

"But its substitute is at hand," he cried.

"Bess, you must marry me now. I cannot wait a year."

And so it came to pass even as he had spoken, and the miners and their families had an unexpected feature in their celebration, for they were all invited up to the big house to drink the health of their master and his bride.

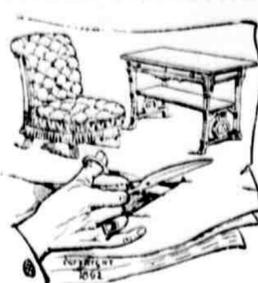
ERITH SESSIONS TUPPER.

At Last. Beneath our office boy there lies A cracker all ablaze, And soon he'll get, to his surprise, That long expected raise.

To Improve the Light. The light given by a coal oil lamp can be greatly improved by soaking the wick in vinegar before using it, and even by re-vivifying an old wick by the same process. Of course the vinegar must be dried off before the wick is used, or it will be difficult to get a light at all, but with this simple precaution a great improvement in the light can be secured. A small lump of camphor dropped in the oil reservoir has a similar effect, but camphor has a tendency toward making a wick snore, while vinegar has a contrary tendency, and hence is more desirable in every way.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

Her First Distinction. One of the most devoted and learned of woman savants is Miss Ormerod, of England, who achieved somewhat unique distinction a few years ago by biting the tail of a live tortoise, or crested newt, to study the effects of the acrid secretion the animal gives out when angry. These were decidedly disagreeable in experience, causing an irritation of the throat, a foaming of the mouth, with spasms and convulsions lasting several hours. Miss Ormerod has since achieved a high scientific reputation, involving, no doubt, many other instances of self sacrifice on her part.—London Letter.

Epitaph. An incorrigible office-seeker died a few years ago and his friends asked a well known journalist for an epitaph for his tombstone.



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